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AUTHOR Lee, Marjorie; Tenpas, Steven
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ABSTRACT

The Special Education Parents Alliance created an employment project seeking jobs in the business community for special education graduates and other persons with disabilities. The project serves learning disabled, educable mentally handicapped, trainable mentally handicapped, and physically disabled persons in DuPage County and portions of west suburban Cook County in Illinois. The program aims to secure individualized placements for each applicant according to his/her skills, special interests, and parental preferences. This report documents the history of the Alliance's involvement in the job development process and its uniqueness as a parent-initiated project with a high level of volunteer activity. To assist others in establishing similar programs, it discusses: (1) economic incentives available to employers through tax credits and training subsidies; (2) methods for acquiring funding; and (3) techniques used by a job coach in the process of job search, job placement, and job support, from the initial contact with the job applicant to the fading of job support. (JDD)

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PARENT-PROFESSIONAL TEAMWORK

EMPLOYMENT PROJECT FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

"HOW-TO" BOOKLET

BY

THE SPECIAL EDUCATION PARENTS ALLIANCE

CO-AUTHORS

MARJORIE LEE
STEVEN TENPAS

MARCH 1987

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SPECIAL EDUCATION PARENTS ALLIANCE
EMPLOYMENT PROJECT FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

PROJECT DIRECTOR

Marjorie Lee

JOB COACHES

Steve Tempas
Dorothy Nash
Kris Sundberg

EMPLOYMENT PROJECT CORE COMMITTEE

Kathleen Glotzbach
Jane Hodgkinson
Linda Colson
Jill Polivka
Ian Welborn
Donna Gerberding
Sue Sovitsky
Ann Ehlbrock

Special Education Parents Alliance

305 22nd Avenue
Suite E-160
Glen Ellyn, Illinois 60137

Phone: (312)790-8880

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FOREWORD

The intent of this booklet is:

(1) to provide a bit of historical perspective about our development as a parent-initiated project and its initial establishment by volunteers who had good basic knowledge, little money, but lots of enthusiasm;

(2) to discuss the philosophy on which the program is based; and

(3) to explain the techniques utilized for job search, job placement, and job coaching.

Inquiries from other geographic areas have emphasized the importance of sharing information about the development of our employment project.

This booklet is not intended to be a literary masterpiece or a scholarly document. The purpose instead is to provide an easy-to-use guide that others might find helpful in establishing their own programs to help persons who are disabled and in need of assistance in seeking and retaining jobs in the normal business community.

Although intended as guidelines for other programs, it is our hope that this booklet will soon be totally obsolete as the philosophy of employment in the regular business community becomes the "norm" for persons with disabilities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our philosophy, our techniques of implementation, and our business structure have developed over the years with the advice and encouragement of many people. Although we risk omitting some good friends as we rush to press, we want to list at least a portion of those who have assisted us in developing our employment project.

Officers and Board Members of Special Education Parents Alliance
Job Project Core Committee
Office Volunteers
Job Coaches - Steve Tenpas, Tracy Hoffman, Dorothy Wash and Kim Sundberg
Our Advisory Committee - Continuous Support and Individual Assistance
Our Efficient and Dedicated Secretary - Rosalie Young
School District 44 - For Our First Office Space Rent Free
College of DuPage - For Welcoming Us to Campus Office Space

CONSULTANTS

Dr. Lou Brown - Basic Philosophy and State of the Art Programs
Linda Colson-Perlstein - Grantsmanship
Joyce Heddleson - Grantsmanship
Dr. Laird Heal - Evaluation Instrument
Dr. Barbara Wilcox - Information Sharing
Dr. Tom Bellamy - Information Sharing
Dr. Frank Rusch - Guidance to the right R.F.P.
Jane Hodgkinson-Cleary - Personnel Policy Development
Elaine Hoff - Attorney General's Office - Post-Secondary Emphasis

FUNDING SUPPORT

Sue Suter, DORS - For confidence in our program and awarding Grant to make possible the job coach positions and our full scale business operations.
Joseph Hamlett, DORS - Project Officer with endless patience.
Sanders Darbonne, DORS - Local office cooperation.
All DORS staff in Springfield, Chicago, and Downers Grove.

Carl Suter and GPC/DD Staff - First mini-grant that gave us our start.

Campaign for Human Development - First seed money.
Knights of Columbus - Lombard and Glen Ellyn - Faithful and continuing financial support.
Milton Township - Revenue Sharing Assistance.

OSERS

Madeline Will
Carol Inman - Our thanks for their continuing interest in our project.

SECTION I

PHILOSOPHY AND HISTORY OF EMPLOYMENT PROJECT

IDENTIFICATION OF OUR ORGANIZATION

The Special Education Parents Alliance is a not-for-profit corporation chartered in the State of Illinois in June, 1979. The original goals of the organization were to provide information to parents of special education students and to encourage better communication between parents and educators.

Beginning in 1982, however,the Parents Alliance created an employment project seeking jobs in the normal business community for special education graduates and other persons with disabilities.

WHY HAS THIS EMPLOYMENT PROJECT BECOME OUR MAJOR GOAL?

The Special Education Parents Alliance has developed its employment project to respond to the need for mainstreaming adults with disabilities into the world of employment in community environments. The project recognizes that work skills learned in a sheltered environment do not necessarily transfer to community settings. Rather, that the training and support services provided on-the-job are a more efficient way to insure success. With the training and support services of this project, community jobs have become a reality for young adults who are disabled. This is an innovative option previously not offered in our area to young adults who are identified as mentally handicapped.

At an early date this "philosophy" became "state of the art" in several model projects in other areas with trained professionals teaching the skills of the jobs in the environments in which the young persons continued their employment. This pattern was not readily available in our geographic area. The Parents Alliance decided to make it available.

During the first three years of the project the Parents Alliance developed a record of success in job search and job placement -- two of the intended three prongs of our program. These accomplishments were achieved through the talent and perseverance of dedicated volunteer parent members of the job project committee. Advice and encouragement were available from an equally dedicated advisory committee composed of professionals representing several special education cooperatives and adult service agencies in the geographic area served. Guidance and inspiration came primarily from the programs in Madison, Wisconsin initiated by Dr. Lou Brown's school-age programs and the post-secondary programs that followed.

Our project committee had the wisdom to recognize from the very beginning that job support is needed after placement to help the young persons learn the skills of their jobs more quickly and more thoroughly in order to be assured of job retention. The addition of professionally trained job coaches has been planned from the very beginning as the major component of the over-all goal.

TARGET POPULATION AND GEOGRAPHIC AREA

The project is designed to serve persons whose handicaps prevent them from obtaining or retaining competitive employment on their own. The target population includes primarily graduates of the special education programs

identified as learning disabled, educable mentally handicapped, and trainable mentally handicapped. As persons who are physically disabled seek our services, the program provides employment assistance to them as well.

Our geographic area includes all of DuPage County, Illinois and portions of west suburban Cook County. In reality this large area cannot be served fully with the present size staff. Further expansion of this project or the development of new projects replicating our procedures will make possible broader implementation.

Two important factors are related to the necessity of making placements within a smaller geographic area. The first is that the job developer needs to have a good working knowledge of the potential employers and the methods of transportation located within a comfortable distance from the residences of the young persons seeking employment. The second factor is that the job coach providing intensive coaching and follow-up visits must maintain coverage of a geographic area that can be served with a reasonable amount of mileage and time on the road.

This booklet and the willingness of our staff to share information may facilitate the development of additional projects in nearby areas based on the philosophy and techniques developed in our program.

EARLIEST PLACEMENTS WERE GENERIC JOBS

In our current phase of the project it is not our intent to locate generic jobs or try to place great numbers in any one type of work. Instead the intent is to secure individualized placements for each applicant according to his/her skills, special interests, and perhaps parental preferences. The philosophy behind this type of job placement is that, just as mainstreaming in education has proved to be a viable reality, so too can employment in the normal community be viable for a great many persons who have not previously had this alternative.

However, in the early years of our volunteer era program job availability was related to the Targeted Jobs Tax Credit program of a major fast food organization. During that period of emphasis seven young people were employed. Although only two retained the jobs for a prolonged period, the others taught us a lesson about the need for a job coach to help them learn the skills of the job more effectively and to be a liaison person between employer and employee.

Our efforts to be the "go-between" on a search for funds for a job trainer within that fast food organization were not successful because of legal factors between the business firm and the potential funding source. This experience emphasized the need for funding for our own program to finance the position of job coach within our own project.

The next round of job placements also occurred as generic placements. Contact with a major retail store in a large shopping center directed us to a subcontractor who provided a cleaning crew to vacuum all the carpeted areas of the store every morning before the store opened for business. This was defined as permanent part-time work. Several of our applicants were placed in these positions and enjoyed the opportunity to earn money and gain work experience.

Although our registry of unemployed applicants had continued to grow, not enough were interested in this one type of work. We also recognized that we did not want to develop a segregated group program even within the normal business environment.

Although we were grateful for the opportunity provided by this employer, the time had come to initiate the individualized approach originally intended in our project and also emphasize the need for social interaction with non-disabled co-workers.

INDIVIDUALIZED JOB DEVELOPMENT AND PLACEMENT BY VOLUNTEERS

The process of individualized job development and placement as implemented in our volunteer era perhaps can be best described by relating the story of one person.

One young man came to our attention after a long history of service from various agencies. He had graduated several years earlier from a program identified for students labeled "educable mentally handicapped." Through an adult service agency he had received training as a floral designer, and he had tried very hard but unsuccessfully to obtain employment on his own.

Our job project committee researched the floral business and learned a lot. For example, the field of floral design is competitive and limited. Many florists maintain a family business and a member of the family is the floral designer. Also a high degree of creativity and speed is essential.

Armed with this information the job project committee realized that the ideal situation for this man would be in a very large floral firm where auxiliary employees assisted the floral designer. A member of the committee was successful in establishing a contact with a firm that was embarking on a small-scale mass production program.

Artificial flower centerpieces created by the floral designer would be reproduced by a small assembly line group. Our applicant qualified for this position and has moved on to work with fresh flowers. Although not working as a designer, his job activities have provided more than two and a half years of successful employment in the field of his choice.

ECONOMIC INCENTIVES FOR EMPLOYERS

It is important to stress that Targeted Jobs Tax Credit (TJTC) and the possibility of On-The-Job Training Subsidies (OJT's) are economic incentives that encourage employers to make jobs available to persons with disabilities.

These incentives were utilized as a major benefit to employers in the early era when our project was not able to provide the services of a job coach to the employer.

During that volunteer era another major factor recognized for successful job development was the quality of salesmanship. This continues to be extremely important. Even more important is knowledge. Every job developer must understand the abilities and limitations of the applicant represented and must have a good general understanding of persons with disabilities.

Publicity to develop greater public awareness continues to be an important element. Related to this, the development of a brochure explaining the project became a valuable tool used to introduce the program to potential employers.

Our present program of individualized job development, job placement, and job coaching as structured professionally by our job coaches is explained in Section II of this manual.

However, it is important to emphasize that a series of placements made by a volunteer committee provided the "track record" necessary to assist in the search for funds needed to provide staff salaries for job coaches.

THE SEARCH FOR FUNDS

Before describing our search for grants, it is important to acknowledge the value of support from local service groups such as those who provided some of the necessities for our early activities.

In our early years we operated on very small budgets. One initial gift from a human services funding organization paid for the first year of printing and postage and for the purchase of an answering machine even before we had our own telephone line.

Initially as a coalition of small organizations we had requested a small annual fee from member groups, but dropped that very soon because some of these groups also had low budgets. It was more important to retain the contact than to seek their funds. We also tried suggesting a fee to individuals to receive our newsletter, but felt that this too was unfair. We really wanted to retain our carefully developed mailing list to help spread the word of our activities and make us known to people who needed our services. And it did not seem advisable to retain only those who paid the small fee.

Over the years one major source of funds has been a local service organization which has assisted our project every year. Their contributions have varied but provided needed office furniture, monthly phone bills, the printing of brochures and stationery, and the printing and postage for our newsletter.

The office space was donated rent free for several years by a local school district. As is typical of volunteer programs, all of the expenses related to our grant proposals and our advisory committee mailings were personal out-of-pocket expenditures. The treasury balance had been safeguarded to pay the on-going bills for the telephone line we proudly obtained.

An early effort to obtain large scale funding emphasized contact with private foundations. A review of information available at the Donors Forum in Chicago resulted in a list of foundations that provide money to projects for persons who are handicapped. Proposals were submitted to several of these foundations, but without success. All of these were unsolicited proposals and were not meeting appropriate review times for some of the foundations. Guidance from two experienced grant writers, who provided assistance to our project, also indicated that our requests might produce more favorable results if small amounts of money were requested from several foundations rather than a total budget requested from one foundation.

However, at this point the knowledge of the job project committee expanded with the awareness that various public agencies provided "requests for proposals" known as RFP's that set structured guidelines concerning objectives and budgets and also set specific deadlines for applications.

The first efforts improved our knowledge, but not our bank account. We were competing in the big leagues with groups more sophisiticated in the field and with track records related to handling budgets as well as placements.

Our first breakthrough came in 1984 when the Governor's Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities awarded us a mini-grant. Although this was not enough to enable us to employ a job coach, the money served a valuable purpose. It provided enough to cover the expenses of visiting successful job sites in another state as a learning experience. Invitations to our "field trips" were extended to other agencies in our area and served to create interagency linkage and to impact on the philosophy of some of these agencies.

As we were seeking continuation of funding, the major agencies serving persons with disabilities in Illinois developed a state-wide initiative for supported work and supported employment.

We presented a proposal and were awarded a grant from the Illinois Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) to create one job coach position and adequate overhead costs for the first year. Our second year has included the creation of a second job coach position and a temporary third coach position. We also have obtained office space as renters on the campus of our local community college- an age appropriate and accessible environment.

With excellent guidance from the DORS staff in Chicago and Springfield we became an efficient business organization. Monthly reports, quarterly reports, and conferences with local DORS counselors became routine. The unwavering support and confidence expressed by the DORS administration has contributed immensely to our growth and development.

Although our applicants must be eligible DORS clients, our procedures continue to be those established in relation to our pre-grant era philosophy.

UNDERSTANDING GRANTS

When seeking grants there are many skills that need to be developed. The first step is to obtain a list of the appropriate agencies or organizations related to the field of vocational rehabilitation and seek information on their plans for announcing requests for proposals (RFP's).

When an appropriate RFP is identified, it is important to follow the guidelines prepared by the funding agency. To a newcomer the paperwork involved may seem overwhelming. However, a step-by-step procedure eventually results in a total finished product - the grant proposal!

Although we are not experts in grantsmanship, we can identify some of the usual components of a grant proposal:

Program Narrative
Objectives of the Project
Anticipated Outcomes
Estimated Time Pattern
Budget

The program narrative may provide an identification of an unmet need, confirmed perhaps by a survey or other type of needs assessment. The narrative may indicate the manner in which the planned project will respond to the need and may describe the anticipated outcomes.

The basic premise of our proposal was that many members of the post-secondary population identified as disabled were unemployed. A parent survey was the needs assessment instrument. The project planned was to employ a job developer/job coach to provide the support service needed to complete the three-pronged thrust of job search, job placement, and job coaching.

Objectives listed included a projection of numbers of anticipated placements during specific time periods. Another objective described publicity to increase public awareness of the work potential of the applicants. This too included a timetable. Additional objectives depend on the nature of the project plan.

The budget estimates depend on many factors, but should include salaries and fringe benefits, rent, telephone service, postage, printing, travel costs to job sites, etc.

It is not possible to provide anyone with an exact pattern of grant writing. However, there are numerous books on grantsmanship in most public libraries.

The key to success in any project is to recognize the need for knowledge and seek out the sources where that knowledge can be obtained.

Equally important is a sound basic philosophy on which the program will be established, and consistency in implementing that philosophy.

WHY ARE WE UNIQUE?

The word "unique" has persisted over the years in any description of our employment project. That word has come from people outside of the project and has been somewhat puzzling at times.

A little self-analysis brings together this summary of unique characteristics:

1. The employment project was parent initiated.
2. The project was an all volunteer activity for the first three years of its existence.

3. The project continues to have a high volunteer component - including the project director, the accounting service, the supervisory team, several office volunteers, newsletter editor, advisory committee, and consultants.

4. The project does not utilize standard vocational evaluations.

5. The project does not train in one environment and place in another. Instead the training occurs on-site where employment will continue.

6. The project emphasizes individual placements and avoids clusters.

7. The project maintains an open door for follow up even though actual coaching is time limited.

8. The project has developed its own style of marketing to develop greater public awareness of the work potential of persons with disabilities.

Some of the characteristics listed are not totally unique to our project, but are not widespread in the geographic area covered by this program.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

No one can predict the future. However, there are many thoughts and plans for the years ahead.

Our project was based on the assumption that many persons with disabilities had finished their education but were not able to obtain or retain employment in the business community without assistance. The age level of our placments confirmed this premise with a clustering around the 24-25 year level.

As our publicity has brought increased numbers of applicants to our registry, we see the need for continuation and expansion of our program to serve this population.

The ideal range in square miles served is difficult to determine. As indicated, a thorough knowledge of the business community and the possible public transportation systems are important reasons for limiting the range. Also the travel time of job coaches is an important factor to consider.

Future plans, therefore, perhaps should emphasize expansion of our project within a limited geographic area, and encouragement for the development of similar projects replicating our in adjoining areas.

SECTION II

JOB DEVELOPMENT AND JOB COACHING PROCEDURES

INITIAL STEPS

Section II of this booklet will focus on the techniques used by a job coach when involved with job search, placement and support for persons with disabilities in community environments. Each area of involvement will be touched upon to provide an opportunity for the reader to become more familiar with the techniques used. This will also allow the reader to begin to understand the need for an organized and logical process in the placement of persons with disabilities into real work environments.

In the sections to follow, each step in the process toward employment will be presented with a focus on the specific techniques employed.

The first step in the process is usually a telephone contact from the person seeking employment. This initial contact is an opportunity to gather information about the applicant and to explain the organization. The type of information gathered should be things such as person's name, address, phone, type of disability, and past work history. This will provide a better picture of the potential applicant.

The explanation of the program and the process involved allows the applicant to ask more specific questions. This gives him/her a chance to clear any ambiguities before becoming involved. This also gives the applicant the opportunity to determine if the service offered is appropriate and beneficial.

After the initial contact has been established a questionnaire is sent. The questionnaire asks for information on a variety of topics. Beyond general questions, the questionnaire should include a request for information on special education program attended, types of jobs preferred and other interests. This written information is helpful prior to the interview. It also helps focus the interview by allowing the interviewer to emphasize specific areas and prepare questions appropriately.

As mentioned the interview is the next step in the employment process. The interview is used to gather information. The first type of information is historical. This includes work and educational histories and past social patterns. The work and educational backgrounds provide a look at the type of experiences the applicant has had. Further information can be gathered on how well the person performed in these past experiences. This in turn can be used as a small part of the informal assessment data collected during the interview.

The second type of information gathered deals with the applicant's interests. This information provides clues as to appropriate job development. The interest information can be used to determine where the applicant may be most successful. The information also gives an idea of the applicant's recognition of his/her capabilities and expectations, and also highlights potential vocational areas. The areas questioned concern hobbies, work preferences, and dislikes. The interview also gives the interviewer an opportunity to provide information.

Following is an example of the information given to the applicants during an interview:

> "The job coach is involved with the job search, placement, and support. Once the person is placed on the job the job coach provides instruction in each specific step of the given task. Next the job coach observes the employee to gather information the level of independence in each task. Further instruction or adaptations are provided to help the employee complete the task as independently as possible. Once the employee shows independence we begin to fade our support until finally we are only making an occasional spot check to collect data and insure maintenance of work skills."

This also provides an opportunity to emphasize the goal of independence on the job as soon as possible. Additionally remember to provide the applicant with any information on the required procedures of other agencies if related to planned employment.

The interview should be used to determine the job goals. Part of this should include a definition of the area that is considered accessible by the applicant. To determine this the applicant and interviewer have to share thoughts and information. For example:

- What type of transportation is available?
- Is applicant familiar with the transportation?
- Is the transportation reliable?
- Is the transportation appropriate?

Once an area has been defined the job coach can begin to focus his/her efforts. The interviewer should inquire about any potential job leads that may already be developed (family, business, friend) or types of jobs that seem of particular interest.

Once all the information has been gathered it must be considered so that an appropriate job can be developed. This approach of looking for the job that fits the individual's unique characteristics has been most successful. Our policy differs from agencies that seek job openings in the community and arbitrarily place workers. The focus always should remain on the applicants abilities. This will direct the job developer to a job that the applicant will retain longer, will enjoy more, and will be more successful because of the individualization.

JOB SEARCH

Once the job goals have been set, the job search may begin. For the potential placement to be successful all the goals should be considered. Attempts should be made to adhere to the goals as closely as possible. Slight deviation from the goals should occur only when absolutely necessary.

The first step involved in job search is to survey the determined area for potential employment sites. The person developing the job should pay particular attention to the typical jobs that may occur at each site. When the potential employers are located, transportation should be double checked to

insure that the sites are actually accessible.

At this point it is time to approach employers. Contacts should be made based on the type of business selected. We have found that contacts made in person are most successful. Sometimes, though, it is appropriate to set up an appointment with an employer by phone. The job coach should use his/her best business and sales sense to judge this.

During the meeting with the employer the job coach will have an opportunity to present the program and also to observe the job possibilities in that environment.

During the presentation, which will be addressed later, there are a few major components to observe.

First we need look at the work environment. At all times we try to maintain "Natural Proportions". This term refers to the fact that 1% of the population are persons with disabilities, and that in any sub-grouping of the population not more than 1% should be persons with disabilities. This allows the persons with disabilities to be looked upon as individuals rather than a stereotyped group.

Another factor necessary for a desirable job site is the availability of good opportunities for interaction with non-disabled co-workers. Attention should be given to the amount of opportunities that may be available in the particular work setting.

During the presentation ask the employer to give a description of the types of jobs that occur within the job site. Pay particular attention to the job skills. The job skills should also be specifically matched to the applicant's abilities. Obviously this will make job training smoother. It also will present the applicant as most independent and most capable. At this point the contact can go one of three directions. The most desirable is that the employer will be willing to place a person immediately. If this is the situation then the job coach needs to begin immediately to inventory the job site.

The second possibility is that the employer is interested but has nothing available at the present time. This situation presents the opportunity to develop a completely new job, which involves looking at the current job site and attempting to make it more efficient. One possible suggestion is dividing the current workers' labor so that they can focus their energy in areas that are more appropriate to their skills and assigning a portion of their labor to the new employee. This is better understood through a practical example.

> In a hospital pharmacy we currently have three skilled employees spending the majority of their day using their highly specialized training. During the remainder of the day they spend their time packaging materials. We could suggest that the employer allow the current employees to focus on the skilled tasks and give the remaining packaging tasks to a new employee.

The final possibility is that the employer is not interested. At this point we should be sure to present the entire program and ask to be considered at

a later date. Once an employer has an opportunity to digest the benefits of the program he/she may have a change of attitude. For this reason we should keep the channels of communication open.

PLACEMENT AND COACHING

When a job opportunity presents itself, an interview should be arranged between the employer, applicant, and job coach.

The applicant should understand how to appear presentable in an interview. Such as:

*Good physical appearance

*Good eye contact

*Speech loud and clear (if appropriate)

*Prepared questions

The job coach may want to answer any questions the employer may have about the applicant before or after the interview.

Assuming the applicant gets the job the job coach must know what skills to train. First it is important to make a general inventory of the environment. This is done to become familiar with the site and to become aware of any special considerations in the work environment. Next become familiar with the actual job skills. This involves an inventory of the job tasks for which the employee will be responsible. To do this observe someone doing the task or do the task independently while recording each specific step. Present this specific step sequence to the employee and allow him/her to complete the task. Careful observation should be made to collect data on each step (whether or not he/she is able to complete it). It is important to address the steps the employee is not able to complete. This may be done in different ways.

One option is to break the specific task down further and provide additional instruction in each of the more detailed steps. Again collect data to insure maintenance and to determine independence.

Another option may be to provide an adaptation to allow the employee to complete the task.

A final option is to rearrange the job tasks so that they fall into a more logical pattern.

Once all areas of concern are addressed, data can be collected. Data should be gathered on all work tasks. This method of observing and providing assistance will allow sound judgments on fading support based on information collected.

The fading of support must be gradual. First the job coach may want to fade out of the immediate work area and then later out of the routine. At this

point spot checks can begin. During a spot check make a quick observation of the employee at work and then speak with the employee to provide feedback. Also make contact with the employer and co-workers to check their concerns. Specifically ask about things such as rate, appearance, and punctuality. Employers tend to withhold information until it is specifically requested. Be as precise as possible during an inquiry.

After the site is well established and the employee is successfully employed contact the employer to get additional information. Discussion of expansion of responsibilities, hours and wages may also come up at a later date.

EMPLOYMENT PROJECT
ADVISORY COMMITTEE

representing

Adult Service Agencies

and

Special Education Cooperatives

and

The Business Community

Richard Aronian	- Electrical Engineer
Thomas Bever	- AERO Spec. Education
Hal Brun	- EDSED Spec. Education
Dan Collins	- Illinois Job Service
Linda Colson	- Grantsmanship
Myron Bagley	- DuPage/West Cook Special Education
Paul Ericksen	- LADSE Spec. Education
James Feeley	- WGN Television
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Shirley Nagel	- PAEC Spec. Education
Michael Raczak	- SASED Spec. Education
Larry Reiner	- NEDSRA Special Recreation
Linda Ronchi	- AERO Spec. Education
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